



*To advance the economic, social and environmental sustainability of Northern California
by enhancing and preserving the water rights, supplies and water quality.*

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY WATER, PARKS AND WILDLIFE COMMITTEE

Management of California's Groundwater Resources

February 1, 2011

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee. I am David Guy, the President of the Northern California Water Association (NCWA). You have requested input on the challenges facing groundwater management in California. My testimony will provide a perspective on groundwater management in the Sacramento Valley and we will offer several specific recommendations that we believe are practical to implement in the next several years. Most importantly, we believe these efforts will promote active groundwater management in California with an eye towards regional sustainability.

Active Management for Regional Sustainability

The State of California in 2009 adopted a new state policy on regional sustainability: "The policy of the State of California is to reduce reliance on the Delta in meeting California's future water supply needs through a statewide strategy of investing in improved regional water supplies, conservation and water use efficiency. Each region that depends on water from the Delta watershed shall improve its regional self-reliance for water through investment in water use efficiency, water recycling, advanced water technologies, local and regional water supply projects, and improved regional coordination of local and regional water supply efforts." (Water Code §85021.)¹ In the Sacramento Valley, NCWA and the water resources managers are committed to advance the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of the Sacramento Valley by actively managing the water resources to preserve the water rights, supplies, and water quality for the rich mosaic of farmlands, cities and rural communities, refuges and managed wetlands, and meandering rivers that support fisheries and wildlife. These water rights and supplies are essential for all three pillars of sustainability: the economy, environmental stewardship and social and community well-being; which--in the Sacramento Valley--are all closely integrated.

With respect to the Sacramento Valley hydrologic region, "historically, groundwater levels associated with the Sacramento Valley have remained steady, declining moderately during extended droughts and generally recovering to their pre-drought levels during subsequent wetter periods." (DWR Bulletin 160-2009, SR-12.) "Groundwater quality in the Sacramento River hydrologic region is generally excellent." (DWR Bulletin 118-2003, p.160.) In nearly all parts of the Sacramento Valley,

¹ Similarly, the Sacramento Valley is implementing the Department of Water Resources' April 2009 Sustainability Policy and the accompanying Environmental Stewardship Policy.

reliable surface water supplies are the key to healthy groundwater aquifers. The ability for water resources managers to conjunctively manage surface and groundwater resources has led to stable groundwater aquifers that are operated within their safe-yield. Without these surface water supplies, many of these areas would likely be either over-drafted or trending towards overdraft conditions. In fact, the localized areas in the Sacramento Valley that have seen groundwater elevation declines are areas that do not utilize surface water. In this context, water resources managers continue to explore more effective ways to actively manage their surface and groundwater supplies through local groundwater management plans. (*See* Water Code §10750.)

As pressures on Sacramento Valley water supplies increase, it will be increasingly important to actively manage the groundwater resources in conjunction with surface supplies to assure regional sustainability and self-sufficiency. Imbedded in this sustainability initiative is the ability to 1) manage groundwater resources for the safe-yield of the aquifer systems and 2) preserve groundwater quality. (*See e.g.* Sustainability of Ground-Water Resources, United States Geological Survey Circular 1186 (1999).) We believe the Legislature should consider the following as part of the ongoing efforts to promote the safe yield and preserve groundwater quality for regional sustainability.

Effective Coordination of Information Management

There are currently several state entities and numerous local entities throughout the state that manage databases and information systems involving groundwater. At the state level, this includes the Department of Water Resources, State Water Resources Control Board, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Pesticide Regulation, and others.

Additionally, the Legislature has helped create an excellent foundation for groundwater management and the related information management in California:

- The Local Groundwater Management Assistance Act of 2000 (AB 303; Water Code 10795) has provided tools for local agencies to better understand groundwater resources and has provided the basis for much of the information that will be provided as part of SB7X-6 (see below) and with respect to local and regional groundwater plans under Water Code §10750.
- The Groundwater Quality Monitoring Act of 2001 (AB 599, Water Code §10780) led to partnerships with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and others to establish a statewide groundwater quality monitoring program generally known as the Groundwater Ambient Monitoring and Assessment (GAMA) program. With respect to groundwater quality, the SWRCB in December submitted a report “Public Accessibility to Information about Groundwater Conditions” to the Legislature, which provides an update on the program and makes several recommendations on opportunities to extend the program until 2024 as called for in the original legislation.
- The Department of Water Resources since 1975 has produced Bulletin 118, an excellent resource for groundwater management in California. The most recent version was Bulletin 118-2003.
- The California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring Program (CASGEM), where DWR will be compiling local groundwater elevation information required under SBX7- 6 (Water Code §10920), which will be available over the next year. On January 1, 2012, DWR will be identifying the extent of groundwater elevation monitoring that is being undertaken throughout the state and reporting this to the Legislature and the Governor.

These programs, and various other programs in the State of California, provide the core foundation that will help promote more active groundwater management in California with an eye toward regional sustainability. In the Sacramento Valley, various water resources managers, in conjunction with local governments, will be providing the groundwater elevation monitoring under SBX7-6. This information will not only inform and be used by water resources managers in implementing their local groundwater management plans, it is also important as an objective tool to inform the public about groundwater resources. This is particularly important in the Sacramento Valley where there are tremendous fears that groundwater will be mined for the benefit of other parts of California. (*See e.g.*, Water Code §1220.)

For next steps, we believe the Legislature, working with the new administration and local water resources managers, can solidify this foundation by supporting these programs and by creating a center of excellence among state agencies, working with local water resources managers, that will serve as the repository for groundwater information and provide the tools for information management and sound analysis of groundwater conditions. One example of a highly successful program we recommend exploring is the Cooperative Snow Survey, where a state entity partners with local entities throughout California to compile and analyze data to inform decision-makers with respect to water conditions in California. (*See* <http://cdec.water.ca.gov/snow/>.) A similar program established for groundwater management could coordinate the various state agencies with groundwater information, while creating a public advisory committee that includes local entities. This type of a strong partnership between the state and local agencies would efficiently use precious state resources, coordinate the respective expertise on groundwater, and continue to solidify the foundation necessary for active groundwater management in California.

Intersection with Land Use Planning.

There are several interesting and important intersections between groundwater management and land use planning that deserve further attention. First, the protection of important recharge zones is an important element of active groundwater management. This issue was addressed last year in Assembly Bill 2304 and should be further advanced in this legislative session.

The second important intersection is the requirements in the water supply and land use planning laws, where the availability of groundwater is part of the water supply analysis provided to the local land use agencies. (*See e.g.*, Water Code §10631(b); Government Code §66473.7(h).) The Legislature would benefit from a report on the status of these provisions and whether they are working effectively as part of active groundwater management in California.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input today on how to promote active groundwater management in California. Please call if you would like to discuss these issues further.